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### Evaluation, Causes and Menace of Almajiri: A Case study of Bwari Area Council, Abuja-Nigeria

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#### Abstract

The research work "Evaluation, Causes and Menace of Almajiri: A Case study of Bwari Area Council, Abuja-Nigeria, investigates the origin and practice of Almajiri in Bwari, Abuja; it identifies the problems, prospects and proffer the solutions to the problems of Almajiri in Bwari, Abuja. The qualitative research adopts a case study method, using both primary and secondary sources in collecting data. Primary sources of data consist of In-depth interviews (IDI) and focused group discussions. The secondary source of data includes text books, publication, and relevant journals and articles. Content analysis was used to analyze the data. The study adopted two theories that will be used to better explain this topic. The Marxist perspective and the postcolonial theory. The research work reveals that, as a result of social and economic deprivations, some Almajiri end up becoming commercial errand boys, hewers of wood, or fetchers of water. The study further explains that the Almajiri are more vulnerable to abuse than other children. The findings reveal that the Almajiri family are faced with challenges of underfeeding and overcrowded conditions in their various schools. As a result of this, it makes them vulnerable to certain diseases. Overcrowding conditions

expose them to different kinds of communicable diseases like cholera, tuberculosis, and various types of skin diseases. Finally, the findings reveal that the Almajiri are sometimes used by politicians as thugs and hoodlums to foment trouble, cause a riot, disrupt peace and achieve selfish political interests. In fact, it has been alleged that most of the terrorist attacks involving suicide bombings, setting places of worship ablaze, killing innocent souls and destroying property, were masterminded by jobless pupils of the Almajiri schools. This research established the fact that Almajiri are not professional beggars or one of the millions of out-of-school children, as some scholars referred to them. They are students of Qur'an schools. We have also noted that the Almajiri system of education has served the purpose of its creation in several communities in Northern Nigeria before now. The Almajiri system of education witnessed neglect over time and degenerated to the pupils' becoming street beggars and public nuisance. The research further concluded that the idea of street begging and roaming around in search of food should be abolished because it is against the teachings of Islam and it is against fundamental human rights.

**Keywords:** Alma Jiri, Islam, Fundamental Human Rights, Education, Children

#### 1. Introduction

The rise of Almajiri, or Islamic trainees, has raised severe concerns for the North and the entire nation of Nigeria. Almajiri are known and referred to as students of Islamic knowledge who begin their Islamic education at the tender age of four to nine years old in a Qur'anic school. Almajiranci is the name of the organization. This educational system is made up of people who have either been asked by the community to teach children or who have freely decided to start schools on their own. Etymologically, the term Almajiri is derived from the Arabic word 'Al-Muhajir', which denotes a migrant. According to Fafunwa (1975), the Arabic word Al-muhajir, from which the Almajiri was derived, had a unique religious connotation in Islam's early days. It refers to a scholar who moved from one society to another in search of knowledge (particularly Qur'anic knowledge). The Hausa word for a student who has been enrolled in any Qur'anic school and is receiving Islamic religious training is Almajiri.

The term "Almajiri" has two translations in the modern Hausa-English Dictionary (CSNL, 2006). First, Almajiri is defined by the dictionary as a student or learner, especially of the Qur'anic school, and secondly, a destitute or needy individual. It is a traditional or non-formal educational system in which a student or learner seeking Islamic knowledge migrates from his homeland to a well-known teacher (Mallam) (The Guardian, May 29, 2019). Almajiranci is a Hausa word for Almajiri's occupation, which comes from the Arabic word Almajiri, which means "one who migrates." He went on to clarify that in

Islam, Hijira (emigration) is very significant, and one of its meanings is actual emigration from a country where injustice exists. As a result, Almajiri in Hausa translates to "one who leaves his house for another place in search of knowledge." He further divides the Almajiri of the Qur'anic school into stages of development. Kolo (infant), Titti Biri (adolescent), and Gardi (adult). Only the Kolo and, to a lesser extent, the Titti Biri engage in begging, whereas the Gardawa (the plural form of Gardi) rely on menial labor and crafts to support themselves. Those who rely on alms for their livelihood are divided into two groups: those who dwell permanently and those who migrate to other places during the dry season (these are called *Cirani*).

This is in line with the Islamic adage that "the best man among you is one who combines the Qur'an and cares to educate" <sup>[1]</sup>. As a result, those who establish Qur'anic schools are doing so as a service to Islam. Such people teach for a living and rely on cash or in-kind donations from students, parents, and other admirers. These instructors or teachers are referred to as Mallams. Students proceed through the learning process at their own pace due to the system's flexibility. After gathering a sufficient number of students, the instructor travels to a rural or metropolitan location in search of a place to settle among a Muslim population. He and his students will be housed in the host community. The sedentary Mallams who establishes such schools, on the other hand, do not leave their homes with their kids. Such schools will accept both day and boarding students, with the residential students being housed by the stationary Mallams. Such mallams may be able to accommodate nomadic Mallams and their students.

The Almajiri system of education has been in existence since the 11th century AD. In the past, when Northern Nigeria was governed by the Sokoto Caliphate rulers (during the pre-colonial era) the Sultan of Sokoto was funding these Qur'anic schools with zakkah (almsgiving or charitable donations) paid by Muslim communities to support these Qur'anic schools. The host Muslim communities met all of the necessities of the Almajiri and their Mallams, which is how the system worked successfully. However, the Almajiri today now care for themselves independently <sup>[2]</sup>.

Almajiri are abundant in all cities, towns, and villages of northern Nigeria, and their presence is now being felt in other regions of the country. They sleep in the outhouses or on the verandas of the decaying houses, which serve as schools or classrooms during the day. They are observed begging every day while carrying plastic bowls, wearing worn clothing, and frequently without shoes.

According to <sup>[16]</sup>, Nigeria is 216,673,551 based on World meter elaboration of the latest United Nations data, Nigeria is the most populated nation in Africa and one of the nations with the biggest concentrations of Almajiri. Recently, the prevalence of Almajiri on the streets of Nigerian cities has become impossible to ignore. In general, the Almajiri live in harsh conditions that make learning extremely difficult. The Almajiri system is a significant issue in Abuja, and Bwari is no exception.

According to the World Population Review, (2022), Abuja (the Federal Capital Territory), a planned metropolis in Africa, is one of the cities with the greatest population growth worldwide. However, it is plagued by challenges, one of which is the issues of Almajiri. It is assumed that a city chosen as the capital territory will be kept tidy and free

of social vices like stealing, prostitution, crisis, and street begging. Almajiri is one of Abuja's greatest difficulties, nevertheless. Their diet is a very poor component of their existence. They don't care where it comes from or how it was prepared; fresh or old food is acceptable. Additionally, depending on how they appear, they don't appear to bathe. However, it is unexpected to see how infrequently they become sick. According to Abdulkareem Kwando, a physician, "the circumstances under which these Almajiri live makes them acquire exceptionally strong immunity to illnesses and ailments, which confound medical practitioners," according to Kabiru. They are becoming a population that is too big for any one person to manage, and they are rising geometrically.

In Bwari, Abuja, the Almajiri practice has posed several challenges to the pupils and the host community. due to the significant migration of these children from other parts of the country, their presence on major roads has recently often violated the social, political, and economic status of the society. They project a negative image to strangers and outsiders, particularly private investors. Politicians have been known to use them as instruments of electoral malpractice and thuggery without recognizing the outcomes of such acts (IDI AMAC, 2015).

The psychological welfare of the Almajiri is not something to ignore. Most Almajiri do not stay with their parents, which exposes them to certain problems. The students of Almajiri mostly go far away from home, it is normal for them to feel dejected, depressed, and rejected. It is worthy to note that many of the Almajiri get maltreated by the locals. At times, they get stoned and cursed whenever they go out to beg. Children exposed to such treatments are likely to grow up to be violent.

The main aim of the study is to evaluate the Problems and prospects of Almajiri as an Islamic institution in Bwari, Abuja.

## 2. The Merits and Demerits of Almajiri System

Considering the concept and history of the Almajiri system, aside from enabling a strong system of Qur'an literacy, it is the bedrock of literacy in Northern Nigeria and has instilled relatively observable Islamic religious value in northern Nigerian society for decades. The almajiri system is the only one in the Muslim world today that allows for the direct reproduction of the Qur'an in writing.

Many pupils have shown the system's deficiencies and advocated its removal. The system's most critical problem is its ties to violence and terrorism. The almajiri system is a major factor in the increase and spread of Boko Haram in Nigeria. In fact, Borno state, which is at the heart of the Boko Haram insurgency, has about 1.8 million Almajiri students and 70% of out-of-school children, making it the highest in the country. Although scholars may disagree about the radicalizing factor in these situations. The Almajiri system does not radicalize students in the way that the mainstream media portrays it. The almajiri system's curriculum revolves around Arabic literacy and memorizing the Qur'an. Some groups just hide behind the banner of almajiri in order to promote social vices. According to <sup>[3]</sup>, the key element in radicalization is socioeconomic concerns related to almajiri, as a hungry pupil would not hesitate to commit violent crimes if he was rewarded handsomely.

Another major setback for the almajiri system is the hatred for modern lifestyles and "western education," which is

referred to as "boko" in Hausa. This is demonstrated in their popular song, "Dan makaranta bokoko, ba karatu, ba sallah, sai yawan zagin mallam," which means, "you students of western education, you do not learn the Quran and you do not pray, except to ridicule the mallam." It's worth noting that the infiltration of Christian western culture and ideology into Nigerian secular education is a major contributor to this rejection. Parents would rather send their children to another town to learn under a well-known scholar than have them Christianized or westernized in a formal school. However, having such a large number of children deprived of western education is worrisome because it is clearly dangerous to the country's future. It would almost certainly be a major setback for the country's political and economic progress. Also, in the case of almajiri in northern Nigeria, the problem of children who are not in school or who live on the streets would lead to an uneven distribution of economic and political power among different ethnic groups and religions.

### 3. Almajiri as an Educational Institution

Education refers to the processes by which a society passes on its knowledge, culture, and values from one generation to the next. Education helps people grow physically, psychologically, and socially. All cultures and societies have access to education. It might be professional or casual. It is also a process in which societal standards, values, culture, and technology are passed down through generations via education.

There are three types of schools in Nigeria that offer Qur'anic education. The first is the traditional model, in which students travel to remote locations to study under the supervision of an instructor (who himself is a product of such schools). Second, there are non-boarding Qur'anic schools, where students learn for a few hours and then return home (typically located in Nigeria's south-west and charging a nominal fee), and third, Islamiyya schools, which teach both Quranic and western-styled topics. The first form, known as the Almajiri school system, is the subject of this research.

The Almajiri educational system teaches young people how to read, write, and memorize portions of the Qur'an. This educational system arose as a result of the faithful's desire to gain Islamic knowledge. Young individuals with inadequate educational possibilities are unable to accomplish their objectives as a result of societal changes. Because they do not meet modern child development and education standards, which are becoming more globalized, they often get turned away. Because of this, they decide to join the Almajiri school system, where they only study the Qur'an and mostly beg for money.

"Begging among Almajiri Quranic boarding school children of the Almajiri system of education in Sokoto Metropolis," Almajiri behaviors are religiously permitted because the prophet (SAW) is said to have instructed Muslims to travel in quest of knowledge. According to Hadith, "Whoever is able to set out seeking will be walking on the path of God till his return, and whoever dies will be considered as a martyr," according to Hadith. This explains why Islamic scholars and students migrate to different parts of the globe in search of knowledge. Begging, on the other hand, was never part of the Almajiri movement's original plan, as begging was discouraged by the prophet of Islam, who brought the Qur'an and knowledge of Islam. According to the Prophet, it is better for believers to fetch firewood for

sale (work for pay) than to beg. Almajiri education began as a movement to enquire about Qur'anic knowledge, with no established channel or procedure for admission (entry) other than the unconventional method of handing over wards to the alleged instructor known as Mallam. It is the instructor's (Mallam's) responsibility to indoctrinate the ward with Islamic teachings and religious practices. This was a rewarding experience for highly educated and successful "sheikhs" and Mulks holding positions as judges and teachers, as they could mold the minds of the young, teaching them how to become righteous and exemplary in their future lives.

Instructions are on an individual basis, with each pupil learning at his own pace. The Mallams usually attends to the mature students' *gardawa* (plural form of *gardi*) while they in turn assist the Mallams in conducting classes for the younger Almajiri. The course content in the almajiri school system essentially deals with the Holy Quran, its recitation, memorization, and writing. A summary of the stages of learning are:

1. *Babbaku* – identifying the Arabic alphabets used in writing the Qur'an.
2. *Farfaru* – vowelizing
3. *Hadda* – memorization
4. *Zuku* – writing specified portions of the Quran
5. *Satu* – copying from the Quran
6. *Tilawa/tishe* – revision
7. *Sauka* – graduation

The condition for full graduation is the ability to memorize and recite the whole Quran. After graduation, a student may continue with further studies in subjects such as Quranic commentary, *Hadith*, jurisprudence, etc. Materials used for study depend on the level of the student. Those who are at the most elementary level of *babbaku* do not need anything. Nothing is written for them. They take verbal instructions and lessons. This way, the pupils learn by repeating what the *Mallam* says and before being allowed to move to the next stage, a pupil must be able to memorize the previous lessons correctly. Those in the *farfaru* level need the slate – *allo* on which the alphabets are written for them. From this level on, the *Sallo* is required by all. Lessons are usually written by the *Mallams* or their assistants except for those at *satu* and above who are allowed to copy their lessons directly from the Quran.

Parents take advantage of this to have children they cannot care for and then abandon them at mosques when they are two years old. The majority of these children are dropped off at school at night and transported to other parts of the world at night, making it difficult for them to trace their roots. They choose to embrace whatever life has to offer them by begging or doing menial labor to make ends meet.

It is worth noting that the various scholars and authors failed to consider that Almajiri (pupils), or children, did not enter the world on their own, but rather had parents who saw Almajiri as a garbage dump to help train or take care of children without considering the responsibilities of the family, or home background in the socialization process of the child as well as the learning outcome.

### 4. Research methodology

The qualitative research adopts a case study method. The study will evaluate the difficulties and prospects of Almajiri as an Islamic institution in Bwari, Abuja, using both primary and secondary data sources.

Primary data is information gathered during a field investigation. They are, however, utilized in conjunction with secondary data that acts as a backup. In-depth interviews (IDI) and focused group discussions were employed to gather primary data from Mallams, the students, clerics, lawyers, and Muslim faithful. For those who were sampled, the interview was self-administered. They were, however, translated into languages that the responders could understand. Separate focus groups were held with Almajiri and their mallam, as well as major Islamic scholars.

Secondary sources, on the other hand, are data that were gathered for reasons other than the immediate study at hand. Secondary data are collected by selecting and synthesizing information from various publications and write-ups. The sources of secondary data that were used in this research include textbooks, publications, and relevant journals and articles, among others. Content analysis was used to analyze the data.

### 5. Operationalization of terms

**Almajiri:** refers to a traditional method of acquiring Islamic education through memorization and recitation of the Qur'an.

**Islam:** refers to a monotheistic religion based on revelations received by the prophet Muhammad in the seventh century, which were later recorded in the Qur'an, Islam's sacred text.

**An Institution:** refers to a place where children are taught basic academic knowledge, learning skills and cultural norms.

**Nigeria:** is a country located in West Africa along the Gulf of Guinea on the Atlantic Ocean, is a federal constitutional republic comprised of 36 states and its federal capital Territory, Abuja.

**Problem:** Problem refers to something that is unpleasant or undesirable condition that needs to be corrected.

**Prospect:** refers to the way forward out of a particular situation or the possibility that something good might happen in the future.

### 6. Theoretical framework

This study adopted two theories are the Marxist perspective and the postcolonial theories.

### 7. Marxist perspective

The Marxist perspective was founded by Karl Marx (1848), a social, political, and economic ideology that focuses on the battle between capitalists and the working class. Marx believed that capitalist-worker power arrangements were essentially exploitative and would ultimately lead to class warfare<sup>[4]</sup>.

According to Marxism, economic relations in a capitalist economy are defined by the struggle between social classes, notably between the bourgeoisie, or capitalists, and the proletariat, or workers, and that this conflict will eventually lead to revolutionary communism. According to this view, the major paradoxes that drive change, according to this view, are located in society's economic infrastructure. These inconsistencies are between the forces and production relations. The different ties of society's members to the forces of production lead to class divides. The ruling class, for example, owes its dominance and power to its ownership and control of the productive forces. The subject class, on the other hand, lacks ownership of and thus control over the

forces of production. Although the subject class performs productive labour, the ruling class appropriates a considerable portion of the wealth generated. Because one class benefits at the expense of another, the interests of their members are incompatible. As exploiters and exploited, oppressors and downtrodden, the classes are at odds. According to Marx, the type of hostile interaction that exists between capitalists and workers is a good example of such a relationship<sup>[4]</sup>.

Marx went on to say that the class conflict between the two groups will only be resolved once society has reached the communist stage. There will be no exploitation of one group by another, and thus no class warfare, at this time. Marxism emphasizes the interconnectedness and impact of various aspects of society. As a result, family, economic, political, educational, and religious institutions can only be understood in terms of how they interact. Economic considerations, on the other hand, have the most influence and determine other parts of society<sup>[4]</sup>.

Despite the fact that Marx influenced a large number of people, many of his predictions have not come true. According to Marx, increased competition would not result in better goods for consumers, but rather would lead to capitalist bankruptcy and the establishment of monopolies as fewer and fewer people were left to control production. Former capitalists who had gone bankrupt would join the proletariat, eventually forming an army of the unemployed. Furthermore, the market economy, which is unplanned by its very nature, would face massive supply-and-demand issues, resulting in severe depressions. Despite this, capitalism has not imploded as a result of intense rivalry throughout history. Despite the fact that markets have evolved over time, monopolies have not become more prevalent. Although economic inequality has developed in many capitalist economies, wages have risen while profits have remained stable. Even while recessions and depressions have occurred, they are not regarded as a natural part of free markets. In fact, there has never been a society without competition, money, or private property, and the history of the 20th century shows that it is an unrealistic idea.

The family, according to the Marxist viewpoint, has a significant role in forming the character and development of an individual in society. However, the family's ability to perform these responsibilities is determined by society's socioeconomic, political, and cultural institutions. As a result, the Almajiri system may be seen to be in action in this situation. Since the ancient Quranic schools system was an important part of the culture and tradition of the Muslim communities in northern Nigeria before the western education system, it was an important part of their culture and heritage. It supplied education and produced professors and thinkers such as Usman Dan Fodio, the 19th-century leader of the Sokoto jihad. The history of Nigerian society's socio-economic, political, and cultural transformation played a role in the deterioration of this school system into its current state of inability to offer proper care for its students<sup>[5]</sup>.

The colonial experience had the initial impact. Most families were affected by the economic shift of society from a pre-capitalist mode to a capitalist market economy. Because of capitalism's exploitative character, many parents are poor and unable to support their children in school. Politically, when the colonial masters conquered the northern part of

Nigeria, the reigns of authority were passed from the Sultan of Sokoto, who was funding the Qur'anic schools with zakkah paid by Muslim communities to the colonialists<sup>[5]</sup>. Furthermore, the colonial regime's new taxes took away the majority of the surplus, from which the Muslim peasants distributed the Zakkah, which supported the Quranic schools. As a result, the Quranic schools were left to their own devices while colonialists introduced and supported the western educational system. As a result of this, parents and communities were unable to fund the schools, and the students were forced to go out and beg for food. Due to the fact that Islam does not impose any restrictions on religious education, parents are free to choose any system for their children. Currently, wealthier Muslim parents send their children to school systems that collect fees and other costs, whilst the less fortunate use the Almajiri system of education, which does not charge anything. As a result, Almajiri schools are known as "poor schools." In light of the previous reasoning, the Marxist perspective is used in this study since it has been shown to be very effective in comprehending the people's socio-economic, political, and cultural structures, as well as identifying the elements that sustain the Almajiri system in Nigeria<sup>[5]</sup>.

### 8. Postcolonial theory

Postcolonial theory emerged in the 1980s as part of a larger wave of new and politicized fields of humanistic research, most notably feminism and critical race theory. In its current form, postcolonial theory arose from and is strongly indebted to anticolonial thought from South Asia and Africa in the first half of the twentieth century<sup>[6]</sup>.

The major theoretical works in postcolonial theory include *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) by Franz Fanon; *Orientalism* (1978) by Edward Said; *Discourse on Colonialism*, by Aimé Césaire (1950); *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, by Albert Memmi (1965). *Consciencism*, by Kwame Nkrumah, (1970),<sup>[7]</sup>.

Postcolonial theory is a school of thought that focuses on the political, aesthetic, economic, historical, and social consequences of European colonial control over the world from the 18th to the 20th centuries<sup>[8]</sup>. Postcolonial philosophy comes in many different shapes and sizes, but all of them are based on the idea that the history of imperialism and colonial control is necessary to understand the world we live in<sup>[8]</sup>.

It has remained concurrently connected to the fact that colonial power in the first half of the twentieth century was devoted to politics and justice in the modern moment for the past thirty years. It has been dedicated to accounting for globalization and global modernity; to reimagining politics and ethics from beneath imperial power, an effort that continues to be dedicated to those who bear the consequences of imperial power; and to perpetually discovering and theorizing new forms of human injustice, from environmentalism to human rights<sup>[8]</sup>.

Post-colonialism is a critical examination of the history, culture, literature, and modes of discourse in Third World countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean Islands, and South America. It is concerned with the study of colonization (which began as early as the Renaissance), decolonization (which involves reclaiming and reconstituting native cultures), and the neo-colonizing process (an aftermath of postmodernism and late capitalism, when multinational corporations control the world). Post-colonialism looks at

the philosophical, moral, and political questions about cultural identity, gender, nationality, race, ethnicity, subjectivity, language, and power. It focuses on the power struggles between cultures and where they meet, which leads to multiculturalism and the fact that culture can have more than one meaning.

However, given the international system's interpretation of the ideals of self-determination and self-government, as well as the minority status and vulnerability of such peoples even within decolonized governments, the phrase may be less appropriate. The Indigenous peoples were denied even the small benefits granted to diverse decolonized regions by the United Nations and the international system of states in the 1970s. Furthermore, the history of imperialism is complicated. European imperialism in the Americas, the West Indies, Australia, and Southeast Asia between the 16th and 18th centuries was markedly different from that of the 19th and 20th centuries. Nonetheless, the continuation of empire—and opposition to it—in human history is a major issue in postcolonial studies<sup>[9]</sup>.

Prior to colonization, traditional Quranic study was a vital element of the Muslim communities in northern Nigeria's socioeconomic, political, and cultural way of life. Sule-Kano (1999) claims that there were well-established Quranic schools from primary to higher levels, particularly in most commercial centers of Borno and Hausa lands. In the pre-Jihad period, such institutions as the Al-Maghili schools were well-known in Kano and Katsina. The Sokoto Caliphate officials improved the system and provided full assistance. The colonial occupation of northern Nigeria in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had a negative impact on the system. For example, the colonial conquest dissolved the theocracy that had previously supported Quranic schools. The English school system was introduced as part of the colonial education policy. In schools, English was the medium of instruction. The Quranic schools were left to fend for themselves with no state assistance.

It was not until 1960 that the government of the former Northern Region established a Ministerial Committee comprised of four ministers to investigate the conditions and problems of traditional Islamic educational development in Muslim countries of the Middle East and North Africa in order to introduce systemic reforms. A delegation of representatives from all provinces was posted to the United Arab Emirate, Libya, and Sudan. The delegation's report advocated classifying Quranic schools according to age, year of study, and so on. It was also suggested that topics such as arithmetic, reading, and writing be included in the curriculum.

The problems of Almajiri today are due to the influence of colonialism. In the pre-colonial era, the Almajiri system was properly managed and funded by the Muslim communities across Nigeria. But with the advent of the colonial system, which goes alongside western education, western civilization, and globalization, the structure of the Almajiri educational system has been totally altered.

### 9. Overview of Bwari, Abuja

To have a general overview of Bwari, an attempt will be made to discuss the geography, the history, the map of Abuja showing the position of Bwari will be displayed, an overview map of the region around Bwari will be displayed, and an attempt will also be made to discuss the economy of

Bwari, socio-political structure and culture, language, religion demography.

**10. Geography of Bwari**

The Bwari Area Council falls under the Guinea Savannah and witnesses two distinct seasons, which are the dry and the rainy seasons. The humidity level in Bwari Local Government Area (LGA) is 48%, and the average temperature is 29 degrees Celsius. A number of hills and rock formations are also present in the area.

**11. Historical Overview of Bwari, Abuja**

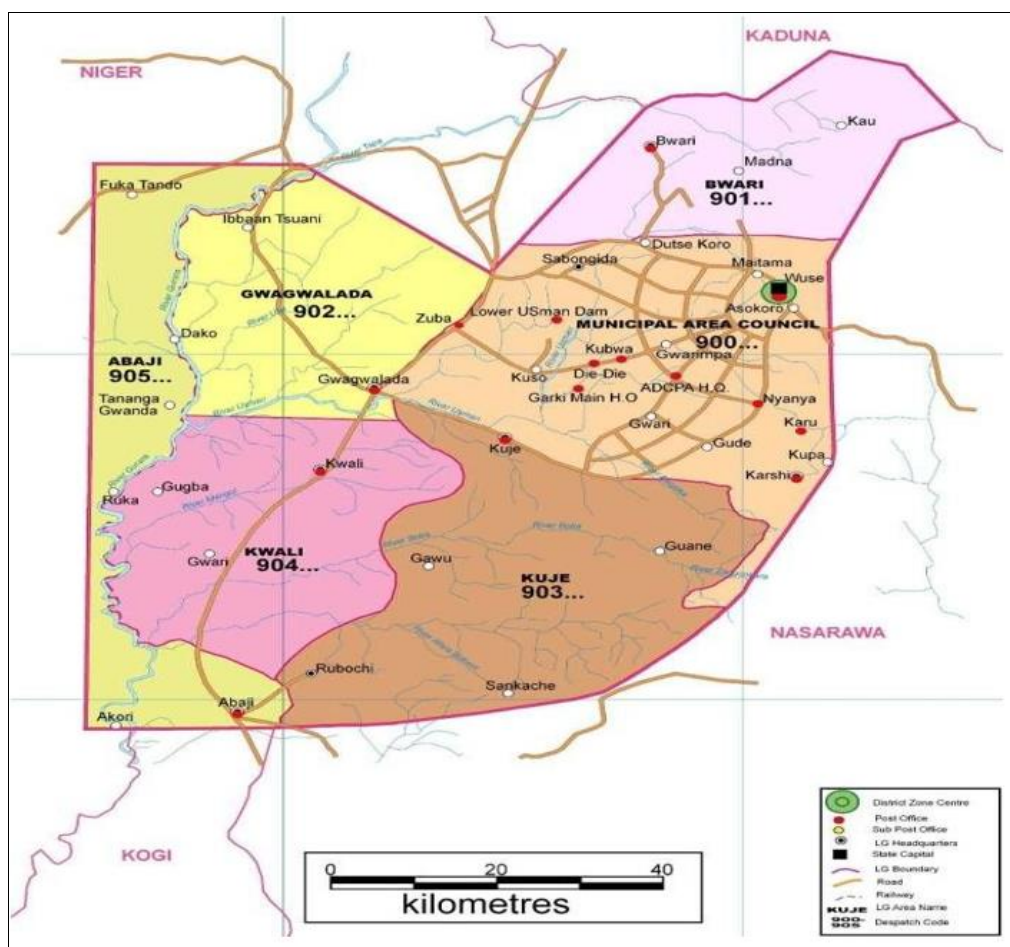
According to Abubakar (n. d) [3], Bwari Area Council is the Federal Capital Territory's Food Basket and Tourism. Bwari Area Council was granted autonomy in a national broadcast on October 1, 1996, when the Council was founded with the Kwali Area Council, bringing the number of Area Councils inside the Federal Capital Territory to six; Abuja Municipal Area Council, Gwagwalada, Abaji, and Kuje. The Bwari Council has been in existence since 1936 when they were answerable to the North Western State, which was the then Abuja Emirate Council. It started as a district head (Abubakar, n. d) [3].

As a people, Bwari's history began in the seventeenth century, when a hunter from Zaria and his family came to the area to hunt. Legend, at the time they lived, has it that, there was a place known as Bwayape (Bwari Hill), which literally means "pound here." The name was derived from the response of the hunter to his wife. When he gave his wife some millet to pound, she asked him where she might

do so, and the hunter said to the wife "Bwaya" pound here. So that is how the name Bwayape (Bwari Hill) was coined, and eventually, it changed to Bwari. In a related account, the hunter's four children were tasked with finding a valuable object in the river's depth while swimming. In the end, only the last of the four was able to complete the mission. Due to his position in the family, however, he was unable to take the throne; instead, his older brother Tayebebe was crowned, followed by Dadadogunyi. The Bwari people still use that item as a symbol in their turbaning process.

The Gbagyi ethnic nationality are the original residents of the town. The Middle Belt (Central) of Nigeria is home to several Gbagyi communities. They live in Abuja's western neighborhoods, southern Niger State, the Chikun Local Government Area, which has its administrative center at Kujama in Kaduna state, and Nasarawa state (Rosendall, 1998 p.1). Significant Gbagyi towns include Minna, Karu, Kuta, Kwakuti, Kwali, Gawu, (Gusolo) Gussoro, (Gbada) Gwada, Guni, Fuka, Galkogo, Maikunle, Manta, Wushapa (Ushafa), Bisi, Bwaya (Bwari), Suleja, Shiroro (Shilolo), Beji, Diko, Alawa, Erena, Paiko, Tanabata, Zumba, and Farin Doki.

Some local historians associate migration with the Gbagyi people's need for farmland, while others say that the Fulani Jihad was the cause of the Gbagyi people's dispersed settlements and movement. There are both big and little Gbagyi settlements. Settlements in areas where agriculture predominates are the major occupation such that there is sufficient land for farming.

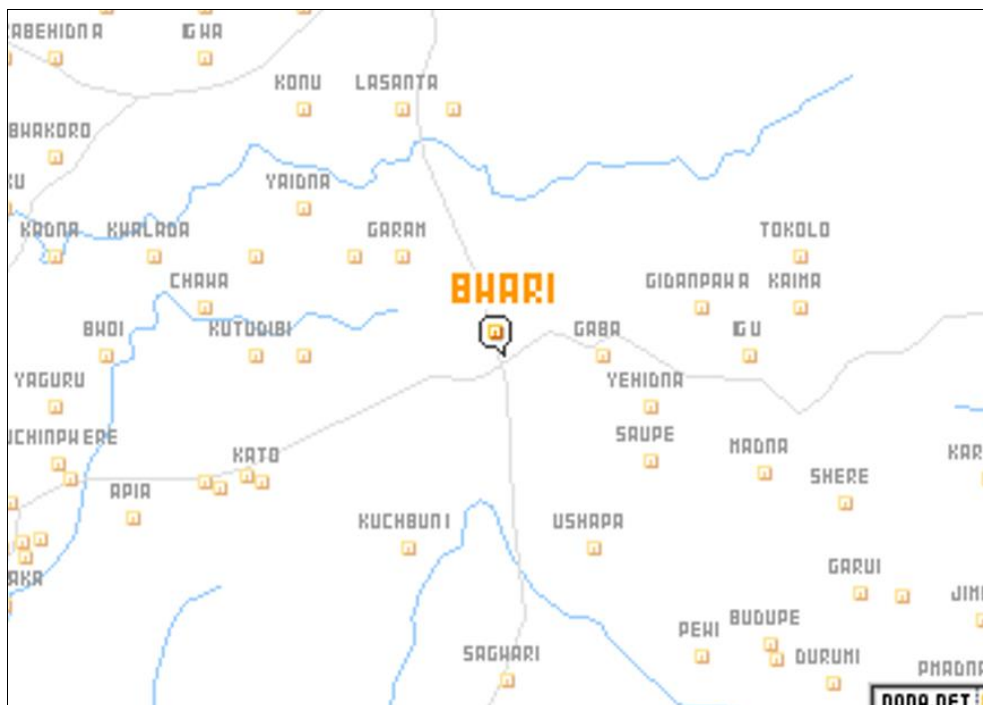


Source: [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Map-of-Abuja-showing-the-six-area-councils\\_fig1\\_318653677](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Map-of-Abuja-showing-the-six-area-councils_fig1_318653677) [10]

Map 1: Map of Abuja highlighting the six area councils

According to Umar (2017) Bwari Area Council has the following towns/villages, with the Postcode 901101: Apugye, Barago, Baran Rafi, Barangoni, Barapa, Bazango Bwari, Bunko, Byazhi, Chikale, Dankoru, Dauda, Donabayi, Duba, Dutse Alhaji, Gaba, Galuwyi, Gidan Babachi, Gidan Baushe, Gidan Pawa, Gudupe, Gutpo, Igu, Jigo, Kaima, Karaku, Karawa, Kasaru, Katampe, Kawadashi, Kawu,

Kikumi, Kimtaru, Kogo, Kubwa, Kuchibuyi, Kuduru, Kurumin Daudu, Kute, Kwabwure, Panda, Panunuki, Paspas, Payi, Piko, Rugan S/Fulani, Ruriji, Sabon Gari, Sagwari, Shere, Simape, Sumpe, T/Danzaria, T/Manu, Tokulo, Tudun Wada, Tunga Bijimi, Tunga-Adoka, Tungan Sarkin, Ushafa, Yaba, Yajida, Yaupe, Yayidna, Zango, Zuma.



Source: <https://nona.net/features/map/placedetail.2239975/Bwari/>

**Map 2:** An overview map of the region around Bwari

## 12. Economy of Bwari

Traditionally the Gbagyi/Gbari are skilled at combining clay to create decorative household items like pots. They are also renowned for being excellent farmers, cultivating yams, maize, millet, groundnuts, and cucumbers with the aid of local farming implements like hoes and cutlasses. Some of the non-indigenes are civil servants, while others engage in trade, farming, and other economic activities<sup>[11]</sup>.

In recent time, Bwari is the home of many hotels, banks, hospitals, and privately and publicly owned institutions, including the Nigerian Law School, the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) Headquarters, and Veritas University, Abuja. Trade plays a significant role in the economic development of Bwari L.G.A as well. The area is home to numerous marketplaces, including the Bwari main market, where people go to buy an abundance of goods. The majority of Gbagyi/Gbari people are farmers, but they also hunt, and some of them produce traditional arts and crafts like ceramics and furniture like mortar and pestles<sup>[11]</sup>.

## 13. Socio-political Structure of Bwari, Abuja

Traditionally, Bwari as an area council has the office of the Chairman. The Gbagyi and Gbari practice a patrilineal kinship system (Shekwo, 1984)<sup>[14]</sup>. The compound of the extended family is headed by the oldest male, which is the lowest level of authority. The compound is made up of square and small hut structures. In a Gbagyi/Gbari community, the highest level of authority is the Esu/Osu (king), also known as Sa-bwaya. He is supported by a group of elderly people.

However, many changes occurred as a result of the establishment of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) in Abuja, including the turbaning of the late Musa Ijokoro (of the Koro ethnic minority and from the Suleja Emirate, where portions of Abuja's land were carved out) as the district head of Bwari in 1976 and his elevation to the position of Sarki of Bwari with the position of second-class chief status in 1997 by the Ministry of Federal Capital Territory (Umar, 2017).

The FCT administration tried to defuse the tension by elevating the Esu's stool to a third-class position in response to the Gbagyis' complaints and confrontation over the Sarki's stool's down grading, but this did not satisfy them because they assert that they are the majority and original residents of the town. The Gbagyi have also said that it was agreed that Ijokoro's son, Muhammad Auwal Ijokoro, would take over as Sarki of Bwari after his death. However, this never happened, as Muhammad Auwal Ijokoro became the new Sarki of Bwari.

Bwari as an area council has office of the chairman. The modern administration of the area cannot be discussed without this office. It is currently co-existing with other kingship systems.

## 14. Culture, Language and Religious Demography of Bwari

The Gbagyi people are renowned for being transparent, tolerant, and peace-loving individuals. Northerners prefer to use the Hausa phrase *muyi shi Gwari*, which means "let's do it the Gbagyi way" or "let's do it like the Gbagyi"<sup>[12]</sup>. The

Gbagyi people have developed as a distinct breed among Nigerians, and their culture demonstrates just how much they have understood about the cosmos. Every day, they strive to give life purpose, no matter what circumstances they are in.

In the Ushafa culture, the word "Ushafa" literally means "show how to tie" in Gbagyi. The Ushafa people are noted for their traditional hand-dyed fabrics made by women. The techniques of weaving and pottery making are still popular pastimes among women today. Within the settlement, there are wells containing deep blue dye, as well as traditional pot-making instruments. Mats and hats are available for both domestic and business use. Pottery is a powerful industry among Ushafa women, where the Women's Skill Acquisition Centre was founded. It is important because it can bring in money and let people show off their creativity (Abubakar, n.d.)<sup>[3]</sup>.

The Gbagyi language is a member of the Niger-Congo language family known as the Kwa subgroup, Williamson (1935), placed it in the Benue-Congo family. Two dialects that are often referred to as Gbari (Gwari gamma) and Gbagyi dialects are spoken by the locals<sup>[13]</sup>.

Gbagyi land's inhabitants practiced their ancient African religion long before the arrival of Islam and Christianity. The Gbagyi believe in Shekwoyi, an ultimate entity and Creator God. Shekwoyi is the creator, the one who created the cosmos and everything in it, as well as all the Gbagyi people, and he expects them to adore him. He rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. In certain circumstances, all Gbagyi people, whether Christians or Muslims, practice Knunu, a traditional African worship. For the Gbagyi, the Knunu custom is a special tree in the Kurmi (forest) where offerings of chicken and beverages are made. They claim that Knunu protects them, their families, societies, and activities from certain bad forces and future uncertainty. As a result, Gbagyi Muslims and Christians face an unsolved duality between Christianity and Islam as well as traditional religion. Even though Gbagyi has had contact with Islam and Christianity for 200 years, people still believe in witchcraft (Trip down Memory Lane, November 19, 2013). Usman Dan Fodio brought Islam to the Gbagyis in the 19th century after the Sokoto Jihad of 1804, while southerners brought Christianity in the 20th century. Islam gained more adherents than Christianity because the Gbagyi religion supported behaviors that were compatible with Islam, such as polygamy, dedication, and the use of rings or amulets. These similarities made it easy for the Gbagyi to embrace Islam wholeheartedly. Despite the dual influences of Islam and Christianity, the Gbagyi people continue to follow Knunu. The religion is based on a "personal god, or guardian spirit, whose temple is in a specific tree in the kurmi, where offerings of fowl and beer are made." The Gbagyis believe that all natural things, whether they are alive or not, have the power and presence of either good or bad spirits (Trip down Memory Lane, November 19, 2013). Majority of the Gbagyi practice their ethnic religion.

### 15. Origin of Almajiri System in Bwari, Abuja

The origin of Almajiri can be traced to the first two sources; the first account traces the emergence of Almajiri in 2006. During this time, the Almajiri system was not permanent. The Imam brings them in the dry season, and during the rainy season they go back to the north. There are no other people that allow their children to walk around other than

the Hausa people from the north (A. Adamu, personal communication, May 25, 2022). The second account from an inquiry made from Falalu, (May 27, 2022), has it that, "the Almajiri system was established in Bwari in the year 2008."

We will recall that, during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), who was centered in Medina, the Almajiri educational system had its beginnings in the seventh century. His traveling companions settled in and around Medina. While the majority of them worked in trade, agriculture, and other businesses to support themselves, a small number dedicated their lives to learning directly from the Prophet (PBUH). They were referred to as *Ahlul suffa*. They practically lived there in Medina. The mosque is connected to the home of the Prophet. So, when he left his residence, Ahlul suffa was there to accompany him. In the absence of other company, they would witness him do and hear him say several things. It should therefore come as no surprise that the companions who related the most Hadith—sayings and deeds of the Prophet—were from the Ahlul suffa. He provided food for them because they had no other means of support and urged others to do the same. Any member of Ahlul Suffa who marries must leave the mosque, get employment, and remain in their home.

After his death, a number of his companions departed Medina and relocated to different locations in what is now modern Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, etc. This made it necessary for the following generation of Muslims to travel from town to town (or even nation to nation) in order to interact with and learn from the companions. The fourth generation traveled to learn from the third, and so on, as the third generation traveled to learn from the second. With the passage of time, knowledge had reached such an extensive area that there was a knowledgeable person in practically every big town with a sizable Muslim population. Some of them were eager and passionate about sharing this expertise. Since the Prophet (peace be upon him) is alleged to have said, "Convey (my teachings) to the people even if it were a single verse/sentence," they actually thought it was required. From now on, this group shall be referred to as "teachers." As for those who did not teach, their ways of propagating the divine message also support the teachers as a duty and provide for their comfort.

However, all the lecturers had a basic understanding of the majority of Islamic disciplines, much as the difference between a general physician and a consultant gynecologist. Recitation of the Qur'an, memorizing of the Qur'an, Tafsir (exegesis of the Qur'an), Hadith (Prophet Muhammad's words, deeds, and quiet endorsements), Fiqh (jurisprudence), Nahw (Arabic grammar), and other practices are among them. Consequently, if you want your child to have basic Islamic knowledge, you send him to a teacher in your locality or nearby town. But if you want him to have specialized knowledge, you send him to an expert teacher in that field. Most often than not, these experts live in few towns. For instance, Zaria and Maiduguri are prominent centers for memorization of the Qur'an.

### 16. Practice of Almajiri system in Bwari, Abuja

The almajiri practice is an old tradition that remains attractive to certain segments of the population. In Nigeria the Almajiri practice in Bwari, can be categorized into two; structured and unstructured systems. The structured systems are called Islamic schools or *islamiyya*. The Islamic schools



are mostly combined with both western education and Islamic education, but the children from Islamic schools or *islamiyya* are not referred to as Almajiri, even though they are. They are either referred to as pupils or students. They have teachers who teach other subjects like Mathematics and English. They start by 8:00am and end at 2:00pm. The Islamic education starts at 4:00 pm and ends at 6:00 pm. After which, the children return back to their various homes to meet their parents and siblings. In this system, there is a proper registration of students. The parents pay money to the school authority and purchase other items as listed by the school's authority, and these schools can be boarding or day schools.

The *Islamiyya* schools within Gaba, according to A. Idris (personal communication, May 25, 2022) they meet "three times a day, 7:00am to 10am; 2:00pm–4:00pm; and 7:00pm–9pm," then the children attend anyone that will be convenient for them. This time differs depending on the Islmiyya. Bwari, like 'The Center for Guidance and Seeking for Islamic Knowledge in General,' meets only on Saturdays and Sundays I. Abdurrahman, (personal communication, May 26, 2022). The *Islamiyyah* is a day school.

In this school, the first stage of learning is the alphabet, followed by translation and memorization of the Qur'an (I. Abdurrahman, personal communication, May 26, 2022). According to I. Abdurrahman (personal communication, May 26, 2022), the children in his own school are given "two surahs (chapters) of the Qur'an every week to memorize," but when a surah is very long, only one surah can be given for a week. They make sure each of the pupils recites their given surahs in class the following week. So, apart from the surahs every week, some parts of hadith are also given. The Mallam levied N50 on the children in some Islamiyya, and even at the end, not everyone came with it (A. Yusuf, personal communication, May 27, 2022).

In the unstructured system, there is no monetary registration of students. Most of the time, the mallam may not be able to give an account of the number of students under him. According to A. Adamu (personal communication, May 25, 2022), "After learning the Qur'an, the Mallam discharges them to go and look for something to eat." They don't go back to their parents after school. They remain with the Mallams till the end of their studies. It is important to know that most Almajiri in Bwari are not specifically from Bwari; some of them are from other northern states, and the parents are very far away from the children.

### 17. Benefits of Almajiri System in Bwari, Abuja

The almajiri system was first intended to instill in young minds the sound doctrine of Islam as spelt out in the holy Quran. In essence, it was designed to instill in youngsters a foundational sense of spirituality, morality, and social responsibility. Additionally, it was intended to teach children the importance of helping others in need (Okoro, 2012) [12]. The Almajiri system makes the children know more about the religion; it gives them a sense of direction in life and also helps to train the upcoming ones who will help in the spread of the faith (A. Adamu, focus group discussion, June 11, 2022). According to A. Idris (personal communication, May 25, 2022), "It gives one the consciousness of their creator if they abide by the teachings of the Qur'an". The system is a means of seeking knowledge for the poor; it helps children learn other languages (like Arabic) A. Yusuf, (personal communication, May 27, 2022)

According to him, "the benefit of this Qur'an, according to our belief, is not only in this world".

Abdulrahman, (personal communication, May 26, 2022) outlined five benefits of the Amajiri system;

The good upbringing of the children, because by taking them to school or *Islamiyya* the parents are programming the children, you are not living them like that without guidance. The first important thing is to program your children.

They spent some hours with some of their teachers. Learning how to read and write.

They get Islamic education. They are get to know their religion deeper.

They learn know how to memories the Qur'an.

They mingle with other children, because sociologist are of the view that what develop human thinking or the intellect of somebody is the human interactions. So, as they are interacting with other children they are developing, even if they spent some hours there and did not learn anything. Even to listen to the Qur'an you are getting reward, talk less of saying it. So, the benefit of Almajiri system cannot be over emphasis.

The Almajiri's social exclusion creates social explosions, which appear as social crises that threaten societal peace, unity, and growth. Even if there are preconceptions, the throngs of kids who walk the streets and cause disturbances are sometimes misidentified as Almajiri. Sule (2002) [15] lists observable manifestations of social explosion as Maitisine, Yan-Daba, Area Boys, Boko Haram, Yan-Daukanamarya, and Political Thugs. Furthermore, because of the nature of Almajiri education, pupils are exposed to social evils and social explosions, which is extremely dangerous to society. It has opened the door to making begging legal, which is against the rules of Islam.

Society's attitude toward the Almajiri is inconsistent; some regard them with hatred and exploit them, while others give them charity and food out of compassion or after using them to conduct errands. They are abandoned to scavenge for discarded food. According to social psychologists, when a child is exposed to labor at a young age and is denied basic necessities or enjoyment, the child develops the habit of loneliness, which can lead to schizophrenia or other forms of mental illness. In an attempt to convey the situation of the Almajiri, Abdullahi (2011) noted that the Almajiri suffer from complete deprivation and that their appearances leave much to be desired. They stand out with their unkempt hair, filthy cheeks, blistering lips, stained teeth, crusty skin, smelling bags, and bare feet. They sing melodies that make people want to give them money, and they go up to people with plastic bowls and dirty clothes and ask for money.

### 18. Management of Almajiri System in Bwari, Abuja

The Amajiri system can be better managed if the government, parents and families, religious leaders, and nongovernmental organizations can wake up to their responsibility.

### 19. Role of Government

In the past, the Nigerian government made efforts to upgrade and transform the Almajiri educational system into the country's main stream educational system. But when President Goodluck Ezekiel Jonathan was in charge, the Federal Government of Nigeria did something brave by reviewing the National Policy on Education and putting in place the Transformation Agenda (Quaduri, 2015).

On April 10, 2012, the Nigerian government legally signed Almajiri education into law. In July 2013, the Minister of State for Education, Ezenwo N. Wike, told the National Economic Council:

To ensure that Almajiri are provided with opportunities for access to Basic Education.

Federal Government set up the National Committee on Implementation of Almajiri Education Programme.

The Committee is charged with integrating the Almajiri into the UBE Programme without prejudice to acquiring a sound mastery of Qur'anic knowledge.

The programme is to help in the acquisition of skills to enable them participate more actively in society. The Almajiri Education Programme is in line with the Transformation Agenda of the administration under President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, GCFR

The Transformation Agenda has a key component on Education and Human Capital Development.

The 4-Year Strategic Plan for the Development of the Education Sector: 2011-2015 has been developed to actualize the Transformation Agenda

The Almajiri Education Programme is concerned with Access to Quality Education; which are the two strategic goals of Nigerian Education

According to him, the program would also include the acquisition of diverse skills to enable people to engage more constructively in the development of their immediate surroundings and the nation at large. This event shows that the Federal Authority is not ignoring the threat posed by the Almajiri system. Similarly, the author's visit to various Almajiri facilities in Niger and Nasarawa States demonstrated that the authorities are serious about integrating almajiri students into the national educational system. Quadri also recognizes the government's engagement through the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TET fund) and the Universal Basic Education Commission, which resulted in the creation of day and boarding facilities for students and faculty<sup>[14]</sup>. Furthermore, an in-depth survey conducted by the Leadership Newspaper, one of the country's main daily newspapers, indicated that the Federal Government has intervened to improve the status of these boys. Classroom buildings are being built in the northern areas of the country where the system is being used<sup>[14]</sup>.

<sup>[15]</sup> acknowledged the government's engagement in finding a long-term solution to the problem, but much more has to be done because some infrastructures in some states are lying fallow and unattended. Following the thrill of groundbreaking and inauguration celebrations, some state administrations starve the scheme and allow it to die "naturally." It is unfortunate that the present government has not really made an effort to revive or improve this project by the past administration. According to A. Adamu (personal communication, May 25, 2022),

My advice to the government or any other organization, is if they want to help the condition of the Almajiri, they have to call all the teachers taking care of those children, they have to give them a guild that will lend them to the proper way. Even though they need assistance from the government which they will use to train the children. Government should put some guide for example, for you to be a teacher you must know how to read and write even if it is a little western education and Islamic education. Government should help the children to acquire some skill. For example, I have 10 children I am teaching, I only teach them how to read and

write that is all. No any other thing, no any job or skills to assist them. They should teach them how to move forward. Let them learn some skills, like tailoring, carpenter etc. Just anything to help them become independent.

## 20. Conclusion

This study proved that, contrary to what some academics have asserted, the Almajiri are neither beggars, out-of-school children nor professional beggars. They attend schools that teach the Qur'an. We have also highlighted that the Almajiri educational system has already served the intended purposes in a number of areas in Northern Nigeria. It is obvious that the system offered social benefit in Nigeria before to colonial invasion. Over time, the Almajiri educational system suffered from neglect and deteriorated to the point where the students turned into begging on the streets and a public nuisance. According to the publication, the Almajiri in Bwari face a number of serious issues, including street begging, violent insecurity, housing, nutrition, a lack of parental supervision, and poor personal cleanliness. Identifying the roles that the community, Islam, and non-governmental organizations must play to help better manage and fix the Almajiri system. Finally, according to this research, the practice of begging on the streets and wandering around in search of food should be outlawed because it violates both basic human rights and it against Islamic principles.

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